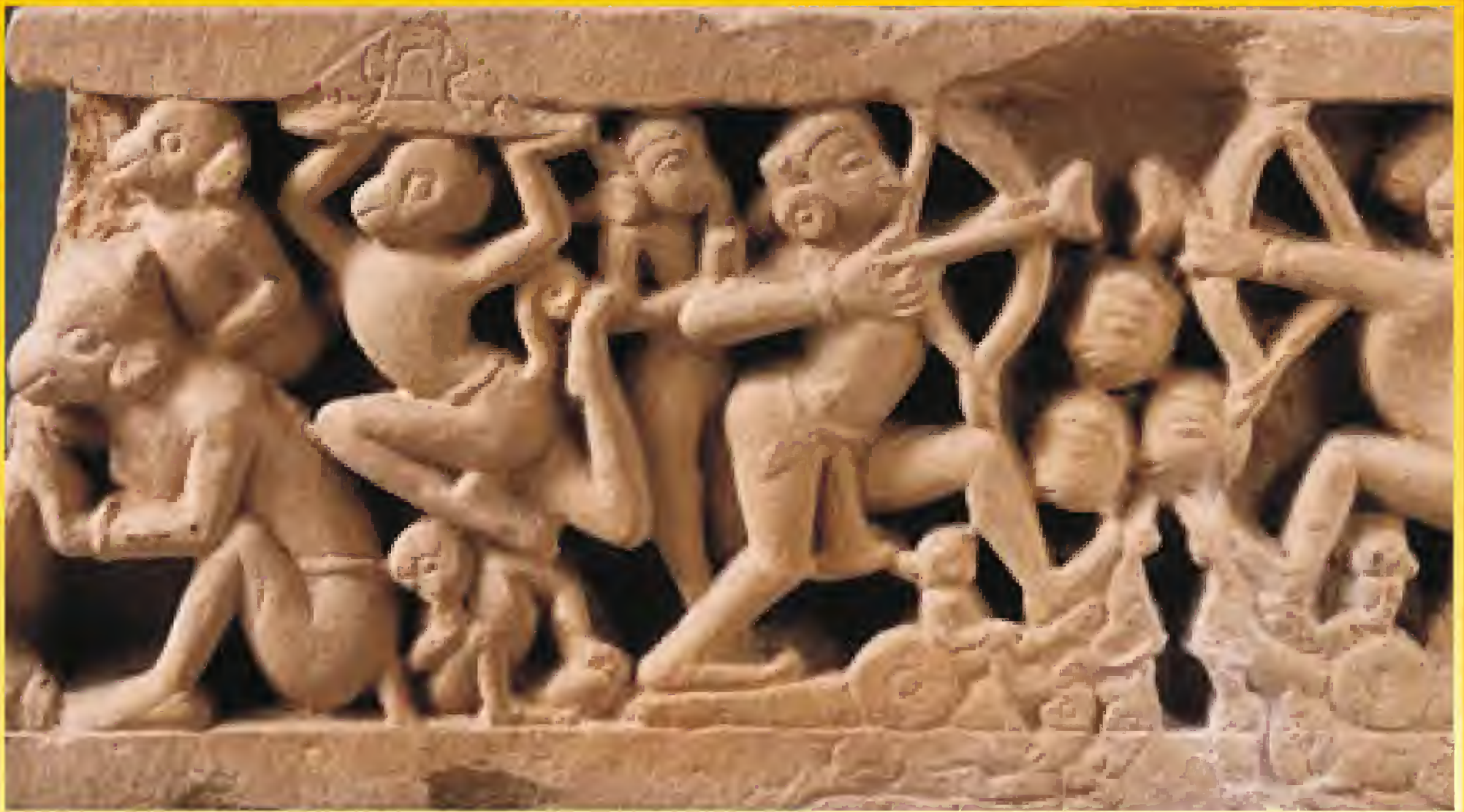


# Children's Illustrated Ramayanam

*Retold by: Vishnu B*

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Children's Illustrated

# *Ramayanam*

Retold by: *Vishnu B*

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**Children's Illustrated**

***Ramayanam*** (English)

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Long long ago there lived in Lanka three *rakshasas* named Ravana, Kumbhakarna and Vibhishana, all sons of Visravas. Through hard penance the three brothers obtained valuable boons from Brahma, the Creator.

Ravana was assured that he would be free from death except at the hands of men. Kumbhakarna, because of a slip of his tongue, was blessed with long spells of undisturbed sleep. Vibhishana asked for and got the boon that his devotion to Mahavishnu, the Protector, would never diminish.

Assured of his might, Ravana defeated Kubera, the God of wealth, in a great battle. Ravana seized from Kubera the island of Lanka and a *Pushpaka Vimana* in which, by a mere wish, he could travel anywhere he liked.

When Ravana became the ruler of Lanka, all the *rakshasas* living beneath the earth came over to the island. The *rakshasas* were very cruel. They fought against the *Devas* and tormented the *rishis*. Unable to bear the harsh rule of Ravana, the *Devas* complained to Brahma.

Brahma, accompanied by the *Devas*, waited on Lord Vishnu and prayed that both heaven and earth be saved from the evil of the *rakshasas*.

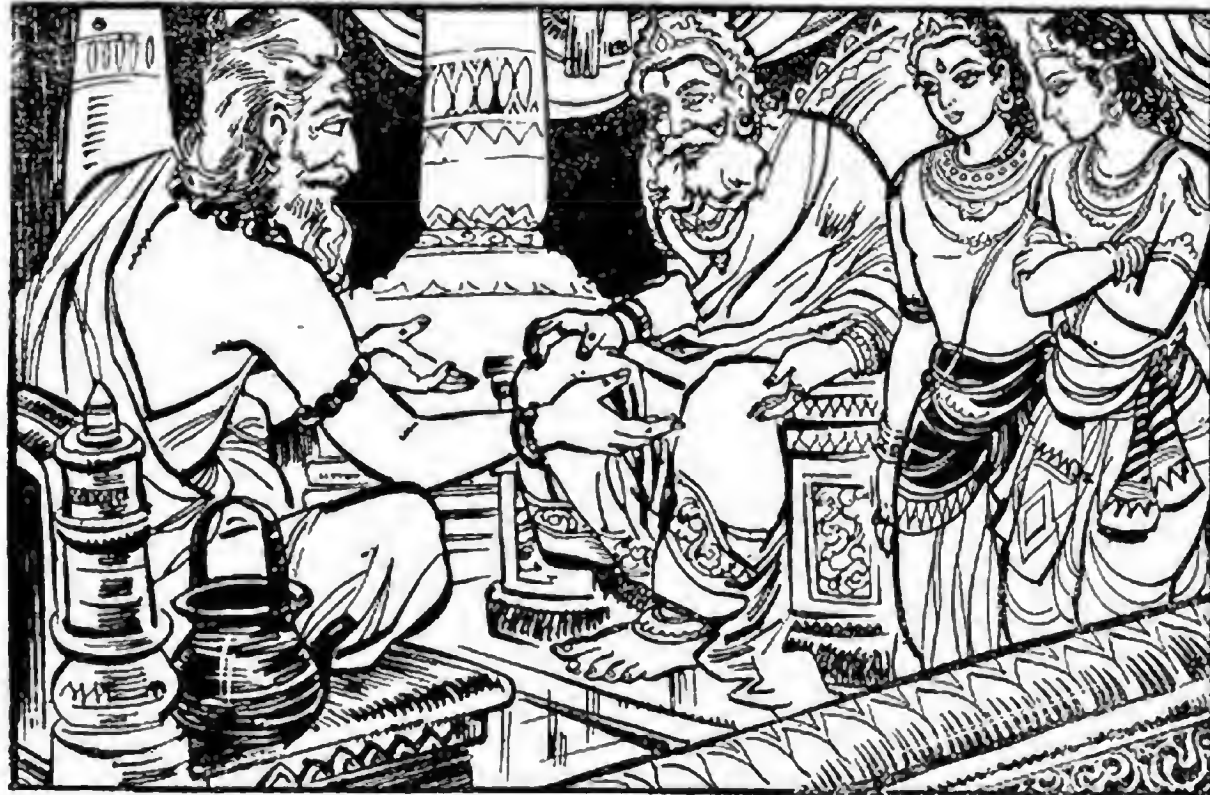


Sriman Narayana, which is another name for Vishnu, asked the *Devas* to take courage and shed their fears. He assured them he would appear on earth as a mortal and deal with Ravana and his followers. He announced that He would take the form of the four sons of Dasaratha, Emperor of Ayodhya. He asked the *Devas* to assume the shape of *vanaras* (monkeys) and help the Protector.

Now Dasaratha of the Surya (Sun) dynasty had reigned over Ayodhya, a prosperous kingdom in the valley of the Ganga, for sixty thousand years. Yet he had no children by any one of his three wives. He decided to perform the great sacrifice known as *Putrakameshti* for obtaining from the Gods the gift of parenthood. He was anxious to beget a child who would become the heir to the throne and continue the dynasty.

At the end of the sacrifice which he performed with the help of sages and wise men a *Deva Duta* (heavenly messenger) appeared from the fire and handed to Dasaratha a bowl of sacred *Payasam* (porridge) to be given to the three queens so that they might beget children.







On an auspicious day, at a moment full of good omens, Kausalya, the eldest of the queens, gave birth to a beautiful child who was named Rama. Sumitra bore twins who were called Lakshmana and Satrughna. Kaikeyi, the youngest and the most beloved consort of Dasaratha, bore Bharata.

The four princes grew up amidst a wealth of affection and studious care. They became learned in all the arts of peace and war and were loved by the people.

One day there came to Dasaratha's court the sage Viswamitra who was greatly respected for his penances by men, Devas and Gods alike, Viswamitra told the Emperor that he was going to perform a mighty sacrifice for the good of the world and its people. But the rakshasas and other evil creatures roaming about in the forest were plaguing the rishis. The sage wanted Rama to go with him to the forest to guard the sacrificial fire and protect the rishis from harm.

After much argument Dasaratha reluctantly agreed to send Rama and Lakshmana with Viswamitra.



On the way to the sacrificial spot Viswamitra taught the princes many valuable lessons in the course of which he told them how they could endure hardships and use powerful Astras (weapons).

As they moved forward, a Rakshasi called Tataka, who was held in dread by the Rishis as well as by the denizens of the forest, accosted them. Viswamitra advised Rama that though Tataka was a woman she was the very personification of evil. It was right, therefore, that a prince like Rama should destroy the demon and rid the world of the evil. Thereupon Rama killed Tataka with a well-aimed arrow.

At Viswamitra's Asrama (cottage) the sacrifice was performed for six days and nights. The princes kept vigil and warded off the evil spirits, which tried to desecrate the sacrifice.



The sacrifice over, Viswamitra took the princes along with him to Mithila where the pious king Janaka was reigning.

At a lovely spot on the way there was a lonely untenanted hermitage. The sage told the princes that the lonely hut was once the abode of the great-soul Gautama. One day, unwittingly, his wife Ahalya committed a great offence. Gautama cursed her to spend her days lying in ashes until such time as Sri Rama came there. He added that she should worship Him in order to rid herself of the curse.

Sage Viswamitra led the princes to the Asrama where the youths hastened to touch her feet in all reverence.

Ahalya, in her wondrous lovely form offered unto them the highest hospitality, and her curse fell off. Gautama also appeared on the scene and the hermit-couple paid homage to Sri Rama.



At Mithila, King Janaka showed the princes the mighty bow of Shiva, the Destroyer. So far no one had been able to lift the bow or bend it even slightly. Janaka had declared that he who bent or wielded the bow would win the hand of his daughter, Janaki, or Sita as she was better known, in marriage.

At Viswamitra's bidding, Rama lifted the bow and pulled the string, when lo! the famous bow snapped in two in his hands. The crowds of people who were watching could scarcely believe their eyes.

Dasaratha was sent for and preparations were made on a grand scale for the wedding of Rama and Sita.





Emperor Dasaratha reached Mithila with a large retinue of nobles, sages and counsellors. An auspicious moment was chosen for the wedding. It was also decided to perform the marriages of the other three princes of Ayodhya on the same occasion.

Sage Vasishta, learned in the Vedas and the Sastras (religious precepts), conducted the sacred ceremony.

The weddings were performed in great pomp and splendour. The Devas and the beings of the heavens appeared in large numbers in the skies and showered their blessings on the princely couples.



After a short while, Rama and his brothers, with their brides, started on their way back to Ayodhya. Hardly had they begun their journey when they were confronted by the terrible Parasurama who was none other than Vishnu in one of his many forms.

Parasurama addressed Rama thus, "Oh! Rama, I have heard that at the court of Janaka you broke the mighty bow of Shiva. If you are so powerful, try and wield this bow which I have in my hand."

Rama took the bow, bent it without effort and let go an arrow from it. Parasurama was humbled and was pardoned by Sri Rama.

The princes, continuing their journey, reached Ayodhya. The people with unbounded joy welcomed them.



Dasaratha had reigned over Ayodhya for a very long time. He now felt it was time to retire and hand over the rule of the kingdom to his eldest son, Rama, as was the custom among the Kshatriyas (ruling class). Sri Rama had already earned the love and esteem of the people.

One day, Emperor Dasaratha called Rama to his presence and said he would like the young prince to be crowned king. Rama received the news with humility, which sat on him like an ornament.

Thereupon, Dasaratha sent for the wise men and rishis and took counsel with them. He ordered that brisk preparations be made for the coronation.





The news that Rama was to be crowned thrilled the whole of Ayodhya. Everyone was happy — all except an old hunchbacked woman named Manthara.

Manthara, who was an attendant on Kaikeyi, was not pleased. She wanted that Bharata, Dasaratha's son through Kaikeyi, should become Emperor. She poisoned the mind of Kaikeyi and made her press Dasaratha to redeem some old promises made to her.

Acting on evil counsel, Kaikeyi demanded that her son, Bharata, be crowned instead of Rama. She also insisted that Rama be exiled to the forest for fourteen long years.

Heartbroken, Dasaratha pleaded with Kaikeyi. He said he would agree to Bharata becoming Emperor if she would not press for Rama's exile. He could not bear the thought of separation from his beloved Rama. But Kaikeyi was adamant and would not yield.



Dasaratha sank in his couch stricken with sorrow. Kaikeyi sent for Rama and, on behalf of the Emperor, conveyed the news of the change in the plans for the coronation. Bharata was to be crowned Emperor and Rama must immediately betake himself to the forest and spend fourteen years there.

Humble and obedient as ever, Rama received his orders without regret. If those were the Emperor's wishes, they must be obeyed in letter and spirit. So true and faithful was Rama that not for a moment was he sorry for himself or angry with Kaikeyi.



Rama took leave of Kaikeyi and went to his mother's apartments.

Kausalya was shocked to hear that her son must part from her for full fourteen years. Rama comforted her in noble words and at last she agreed that the Emperor's commands must be carried out.

Lakshmana was angry at the injustice done to Rama, but Rama pacified him. Sita received the news like a true Kshatriya wife. She insisted that she would go with Rama wherever he went, even to the darkest forest full of dangers. Lakshmana too pleaded that he be allowed to accompany Rama in his exile.

All three then took leave of their elders. Sumitra asked her son, Lakshmana, to do his best to serve Rama and Sita because they were to him like father and mother.



The people of Ayodhya, however, would not let their beloved prince go away so easily. They followed him day and night into the forest. Rama appealed to them to return to the city, but in vain.

At night, Rama decided to evade his people and become lost to them so that they would return peacefully to their homes. He went deeper into the forest after crossing the boundaries of the kingdom.

Soon, Rama, Lakshmana and Sita came to Sringeripura on the banks of the Ganga. They met the hunter-chief, Guha, who offered his own kingdom for Rama to rule. Rama declined the offer and said he must lead a hermit's life in order to carry out his father's wishes.

Guha was an expert boatman. At Rama's request he got a boat ready and ferried the two princes and Sita across the river.





Here in Ayodhya, Dasaratha never recovered from his grief. Soon the land was without a ruler and Bharata, who had gone to his uncle's place, was sent for. The son of Kaikeyi arrived in a desolate, grief-stricken city and was shocked to hear what had happened.

Bharata was angry with his mother for having caused Rama's exile. He would not accept the crown, which was Rama's by right.

The ministers and wise men of the realm begged Bharata to heed his father's dying wishes but Bharata would not listen. He said Rama alone was the Emperor wherever he was and he would go to the forest to bring him home.



Bharata with a huge army hurried to the forest. Soon he reached the banks of the Ganga where Guha was keeping watch over Rama's camp. At first, the hunter-chief thought that Bharata and his army had come to attack Rama. When he saw Bharata close at hand, Guha was sorry for his mistake.

Guha was deeply touched by Bharata's love for his brother and embraced him with affection.

He then took Bharata and his men in a fleet of boat to the other side of the river where Rama was staying.



Rama was deeply moved to hear the sad tale that Bharata told him. Bharata said, "Ayodhya is yours. How can I, a younger brother, bear the burden of ruling it while you pine in the forest? The people of Ayodhya adore you and want you in their midst. Oh! Rama, how cruel was my mother in asking for your exile!"

Rama consoled Bharata with gentle words. He said "Neither you nor your mother is to blame for what has happened. It is all part of our destiny. You ask me to return to Ayodhya. But how can I? Should I not like a true prince obey my father's commands? Should you not also do so? "





The sage Vasishta, who was present, advised Bharata to follow Ramas advice. Bharata was still not willing to go back home without Rama. He again begged Rama to reconsider his decision.

Rama was firm in his resolve to carry out the sentence of exile. Bharata said he would not be able to govern Ayodhya without help. If Rama would not return, he must at least condescend to part with some symbol of his authority. Bharata produced a pair of sandals and asked Rama to step on them. He would take the sandals with him and regard them as agents of Rama. From these sandals he would, derive his authority to rule over Ayodhya.

To Bharata the sandals became sacred objects. He carried them on his head all the way back home and installed them on the throne at a place called Nandigram near Ayodhya.



Rama was unhappy that the people of Ayodhya were forgetting their duties and daily cares in their love for him. He thought that if he stayed near Ayodhya he would not really be in exile. He made up his mind to go further into the forest where he could lead a hermit's life undisturbed.

In the heart of the dark forest the princes and Sita met the sage Atri and his pious wife, Anasuya, and paid homage to the couple. Further on, Viradha, a dreadful monster in human form, challenged the princes. Viradha was, wounded in battle but since he had obtained a boon that he would not be killed on earth, the princes, at his own request, buried him alive so that he could go to heaven.

In Dandakaranya (the Dandaka forest) the rishis begged Rama to rid them of the terror of the rakshasas and Rama promised to do so.



Among the rishis from whom Rama received blessings was Agastya, short of stature and a sage known for his penance and great powers.

Agastya of incredible might gave Rama a big bow made by the architect of the heavens, Viswakarma and quivers, with the following words:

"Rama! You are no ordinary guest, but the Lord of the earth. You are the noblest exponent of dharma, the prince of heroes and deserve every worship and reverence. Last, you are my guest well beloved; it behoves me to offer you my warmest welcome. Behold this noble bow fashioned of yore for Mahavishnu by Viswakarma. Indra left this inexhaustible pair of quivers here. Observe these shafts blazing like tongues of fire and this sword in its scabbard of gold. Accept from me this blade curiously chased with gold and gems, this bow, these arrows and quivers. In the distant past, these helped Mahavishnu to slay the asuras and confer untold blessings upon the devas. Take back these weapons, for they are yours; humble your enemies with them and bring peace and happiness to all beings; even Indra shines not more, armed with his Vajra."

Agastya then gave his blessings to the princes and Sita and directed them to go to Panchavati on the banks of the Godavari where they could build an abode.



On their way to Panchavati the princes saw a huge bird, which they mistook for a rakshasa in disguise. But lo! the bird spoke in a soft voice full of affection and regard.

The bird was none other than Jatayu, a nephew of Garuda, the vahana (mount) of Lord Vishnu. Jatayu said that he was a friend of Dasaratha. He offered to do his best to serve the Princes and guard Sita whenever she was left alone.

Rama accepted the offer and embraced. Jatayu and set off again.

At Panchavati, Lakshmana built a lovely cottage with reeds and grass found in the forest.





Life was peaceful at Panchavati, but not for long.

One cold winter day, when the princes were returning to the cottage from the river, they were met by a rakshasi by name Surpanakha, the sister of Ravana. The rakshasi who was disguised as a beautiful maiden said she had fallen in love with the handsome princes and one of them must marry her. But as neither of them would listen she became angry.

Surpanakha swore that she would harm the princes and rushed towards Sita to eat her up. Rama asked Lakshmana to deal with her. As a Kshatriya prince, Lakshmana would not kill a woman; so he cut her nose and ears and let her go alive.



Thoroughly disgraced and bleeding all over, Surpanakha hastened to Janasthana where her brother, Khara, was the chieftain. Khara was enraged at the wrong done to his sister.

Accompanied by his fourteen generals, each commanding a thousand rakshasas, Khara rushed to Panchavati. But Rama met them single-handed. The rakshasas fell like skittles.

One after the other the fourteen generals were killed.

Undaunted, Khara continued the fight. When his turn came to take the field, Khara armed himself with a huge club and advanced on Rama. The prince of Ayodhya let go a stinging arrow from his powerful bow and that was the end of Khara.



News of the rakshasa rout at Panchavati reached Lanka. Full of wrath, Ravana swore that he would go immediately to Dandakaranya to avenge the defeat. But his counsellors pacified him saying that Rama could not be killed in battle by anyone. The only way to bring about Rama's end was by stealing his wife Sita. Rama was certain to die of grief at the separation.

Others advised Ravana to be careful as Rama appeared to possess the power and might of a God.

While Ravana was still hesitating; Surpanakha came with her tale of disgrace and suffering. She spoke of Sita's great beauty and urged Ravana to abduct her to avenge the wrong done to his sister.

Ravana's mind was made up. He must secure Sita at all cost. After consulting his advisers he decided on a clever ruse to steal Sita from Rama.



Maricha, another rakshasa, would take the form of a beautiful golden deer and go to Panchavati. He would stray near Rama's cottage. On seeing the enchanting deer, Sita was certain to ask the princes to get it alive for her. The deer would disappear into the forest luring the princes away. At this moment, Ravana would appear at the cottage and carry off Sita.

Maricha knew that if he refused to obey Ravana he would be killed. To lure Rama also meant certain death. If: that was the choice, Maricha thought, it was better to die at the hands of Rama and go to heaven.

The moment Sita saw the golden deer she wanted it for a pet. Rama asked Lakshmana to look after Sita and went after the magic creature.





Rama gave a long chase but the deer eluded him. Annoyed and angry, Rama shot an arrow from his bow and mortally wounded the deer. As Maricha sank to the earth he cried in Rama's voice, "Ha! Sita. Ha! Lakshmana."

Sita heard the cry. She feared that Rama might have come to some harm. She forced Lakshmana to go out into the forest after Rama.

Now was the moment for Ravana. He appeared at the cottage, disguised as a sanyasi (holy man) and asked for alms. Sita looked at him and knew that she was in great danger.



Ravana spoke of his great prowess and wealth and asked Sita to go with him to Lanka. He made many promises and said Rama was unworthy of her. When all his words failed to move Sita, Ravana threw off his disguise, seized Sita by the hair and dragged her to his chariot.

Jatayu, the eagle, was the only help at hand for poor Sita. The bird challenged Ravana and fought with all its might. It killed the chariot mules and the charioteer and smashed the vimana. But it was no match for the rakshasa king.

Ravana cut off the wings of the bird and left it to die.

He then dragged Sita with him and flew towards Lanka.

From above Sita threw, unknown to Ravana, her ornaments tied in a piece of cloth in the hope that Rama and Lakshmana might come upon them some day and guess what had happened to her.



In Lanka, Ravana made further advances to Sita but Sita would not deign to look at him or hear his words.

Enraged at Sita's indifference, Ravana threatened to kill her. He said he would give her two months to make up her mind. If she did not yield by then, he would eat her up.

To frighten her into obedience, Ravana put her in a green park, known as Asokavana, with a gang of the most hideous-looking rakshasis to guard her.

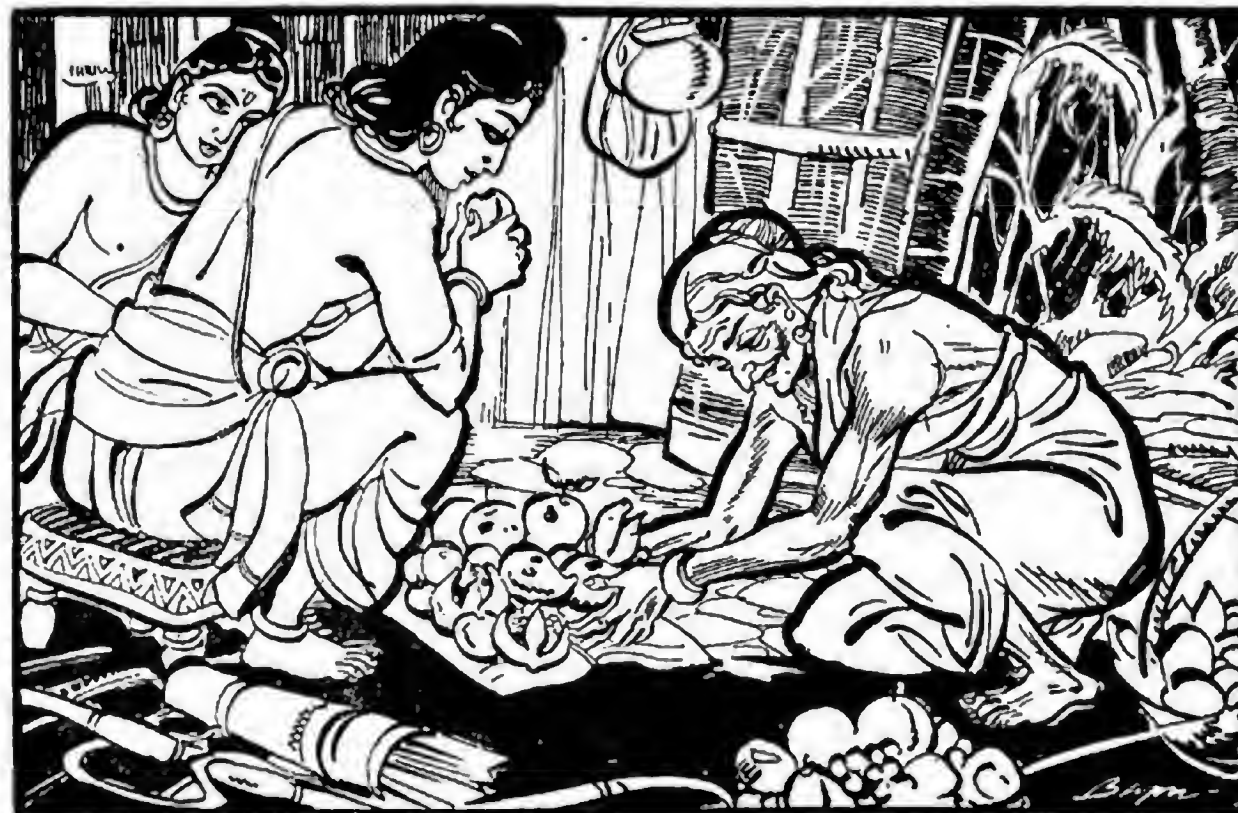
Sita, desolate and woe be gone, pined away. She refused to touch food or drink. The raksihasis tormented her in many ways and tried to make her yie1d to Ravana.



Meanwhile in Dandakarnya Rama, returning exhausted from the deer-hunt, met Lakshmana on the way. Rama rebuked his brother for having left Sita alone in the cottage and feared that she might have come to grief already. Lakshmana explained that he did not want to leave the cottage, but Sita forced him to go out in search of Rama.

What Rama feared had come to pass. Near the cottage, they came across the signs of a big fight and found Jatayu gasping for his last breath. Before dying, Jatayu told the princes how Ravana took Sita forcibly with him, how he gave battle to the rakshasa king and how he came to be mortally wounded.

Rama's cup of misery was full. He had lost his beloved wife and a dear friend of his father was slain.





Wandering in search of Sita, the princes came across a headless and legless monster named Kabandha. The monster challenged the princes to a fight. Kabandha was defeated and the princes cut off his arms. But that was what Kabandha wanted, because he was under a curse. He would regain his handsome form only when Rama and Lakshmana maimed him completely and set fire to his body.

When this was done, a lovely person arose from the fire and advised the princes to go to the river Pampa and befriend Sugriva, the brother of Vali, the monkey-ruler.

On the way to Pampa, Rama and Lakshmana called at a lowly cottage where lived an old lady by name Sabari. She had been waiting for years for Rama to come by. Sabari offered tasty fruits and wild roots to the two princes and they ate them heartily to her great delight.



Near Pampa, the princes met a wise monkey called Hanuman who was the minister to Sugriva. Hanuman immediately took a liking for the princes and became a faithful friend of Rama.

Hanuman swore that he would do his best to help Rama in the recovery of Sita. He then spoke of Sugriva and how he came to be driven out of his kingdom by his brother, Vali.

Together they went to Sugriva's camp.



Rama and Sugriva wanted each other's help. Sugriva promised Rama that he and his vanara following would assist in the search for Sita. Rama said he would help Sugriva defeat his powerful brother who was tormenting him.

Then Sugriva told the princes how one of his vanara groups had come by some ornaments bundled in a rag. A woman in distress had dropped the bundle while she was being carried aloft by a rakshasa.

At the sight of the ornaments, which were Sita's, Rama was over-whelmed with grief. His sorrow knew no bounds.



Vali was a very powerful warrior and possessed many boons against defeat and failure. Sugriva doubted if Rama, was a match for Vali.

Rama showed his prowess by performing wondrous feats. Sugriva was not satisfied. He pointed out a sal tree and asked Rama if he could pierce it through with an arrow:

Rama let off an arrow from his bow, which shot through not one but seven *sal* trees in a row. After touching the ground beyond the seventh tree the arrow returned to its quiver.

Sugriva was aghast and knew that victory was on his side.





Emboldened by the presence of Rama, Sugriva called Vali to a duel. Vali was enraged at his brother's impudence and came out at once to meet the challenge.

Rama and Lakshmana hid themselves behind a tree. It was arranged that while the fight was on, Rama would shoot down Vali with a well-directed arrow.

But Sugriva and Vali were so much alike that Rama could not distinguish the one from the other. He asked Sugriva to wear a garland of wild flowers so that he could make him out while in combat.

Rama shot down Vali.

Vali complained to Rama that it was an unworthy act. Rama explained why he had to kill Vali thus and Vali was satisfied.



All the vanaras helped in the search for Sita. One of the groups which went south learnt from Sampathi, the brother of Jatayu, that Sita was a prisoner of the rakshasas in the island of Lanka.

It was decided that one of the vanaras should leap across the sea to Lanka and make a thorough search for Sita. Jambavan, the oldest of the vanaras, knew that the only vanara suited for this task was Hanuman. So modest was Hanuman that he knew of his own powers only through Jambavan.

Hanuman had with him a signet ring, which Rama had given him. Sita would know from the ring that the bearer was the true messenger of Rama. So, gathering all his strength Hanuman made ready to leap across to Lanka from the top of a high peak.

He reverently prayed to Surya, Indra, Vayu, Brahma and all the bhutas. He joined his hands in obeisance to his father Vayu and assumed an immense aspect.

He gathered up all his vital energies and looked steadfastly at the route he proposed to take. Desirous of taking a flying leap over the sea he pressed the lofty mountain down with his feet.



Hanuman rose aloft gaily from the mountain and with prayers to Sri Rama regarded himself al equal to Garuda the monarch of the feathered beings.

Then, with supreme confidence he leapt forward flashing like a comet across the sea. With his hands outstretched he appeared like a five-headed cobra blazing a trail across the waters. The sea in front of him rapidly diminished in length through his amazing speed of flight. It seemed as if he drank it up and would next swallow the sky itself. As the monkey hero proceeded on his airy route, his tawny eyes blazed like lightning or like huge fires on mountaintops or like the sun and the moon rising together on the horizon.

His phenomenal flight over the trackless waste of waters compelled the admiration and homage of the gods, the asuras, and the gandharvas who showered on him flowers of celestial fragrance.



Hanuman met many obstacles on the way but so great was his strength and so deep his devotion to the task ahead that nothing could stop his progress.

One of the obstacles encountered by Hanuman was the monstrous form of Surasa. She, in fact, was the naga maiden. The gods, to test the abilities of Hanuman, asked her to block his way. Accordingly, she blocked the path of the flight and challenged Hanuman. The vanara drew in his size and became a tiny creature. Before Surasa knew what was happening, Hanuman entered her mouth and came out of her huge frame and she was outwitted.

Continuing his flight, Hanuman landed gently on the top of a peak near the great city of Lanka.



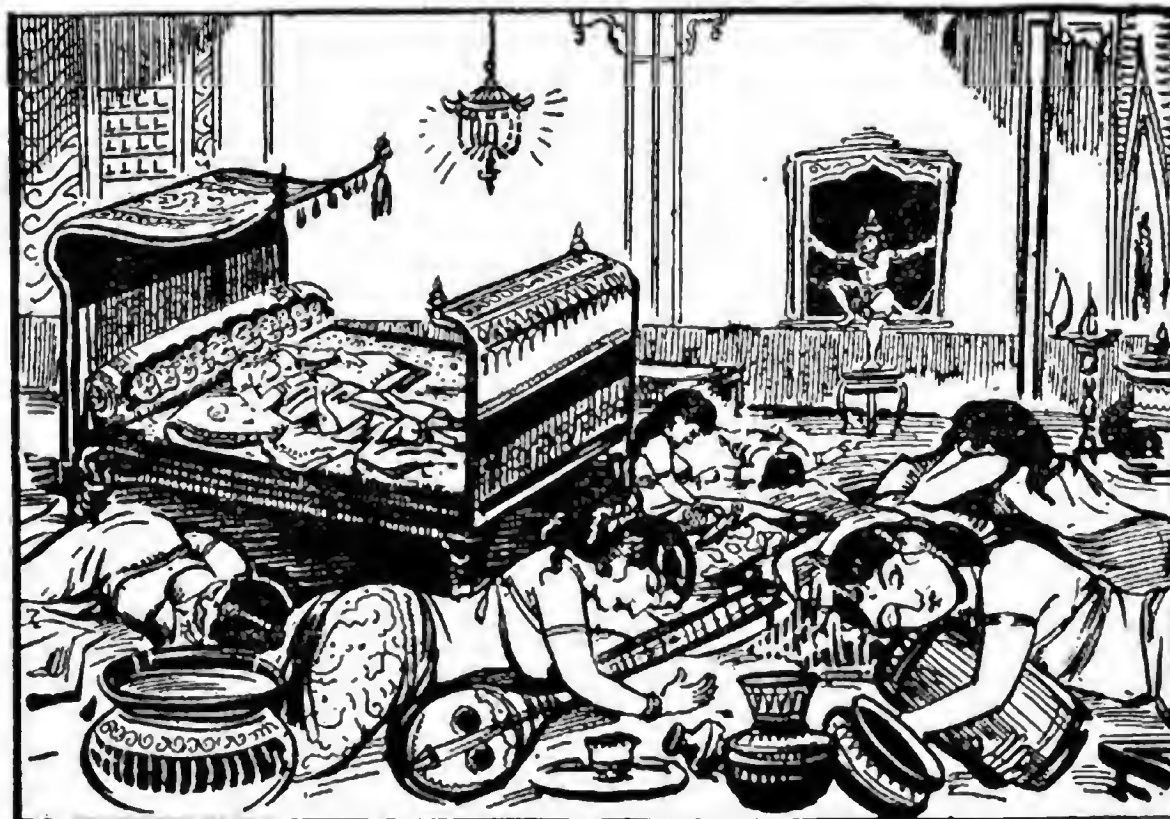


Hanuman decided to enter Lanka, after dark in a very minute form to find out the whereabouts of Sita. After sunset, he reduced his form to the size of a cat and set off towards the main gate. But the female deity who jealously guarded the city spotted him. Appearing before him in the form of a fierce monster she demanded in a terrifying voice, "Who are you, monkey of the forest? Why have you come here? Speak the truth before you lose your life."

"I desire to have a look at this great city and shall go back after I have seen it. But tell me who are you to prevent my entry," asked Maruthi, which was another name for Hanuman. The guardian of the city was wroth and gave him a fierce slap on the cheek.

Hanuman was at last roused to anger. Yet he would not hit a woman with his right hand, even in self-defence. Hanuman, therefore, hit her with his left fist.

Recalling Brahma's words to her that evil would befall Lanka when a monkey laid her low, she merely wished Hanuman luck in his endeavour and allowed him to enter the city.



In Lanka, Hanuman began his search examining every mansion and scanning every nook and corner. He entered the palace of Ravana and saw therein the Pushpaka Vimana, the magic vimana of Kubera, which could fulfil the desires of those seated on it. In the private apartment of Ravana, Hanuman beheld Mandodari whom, for an instant, he mistook for Sita. Then, however, he returned to sober thoughts and decided that the lady who was sleeping in that chamber in a carefree and contented manner could not be Sita. Having thus, decided he renewed his search for Sita through the halls.

There he found many ladies as they lay at their ease under the influence of wine and sleep; some lay pillowed upon instruments of music; some lay upon lounges and some upon priceless rugs and carpets - all sunk in the arms of sleep. Maruthi also beheld Ravana, the lord and ruler of the rakshasa empire, lying at his ease in a beautiful couch nearby.



Though Maruthi scanned the entire city inch by inch he could not find Sita.

The thought of failure depressed him. " Nought is there for me but to give up my life," he thought. He now remembered what Sampathi had said. Was he wrong or had the rakshasas eaten up Sita, he wondered. In anxiety and despair He sat there for some time not knowing what to do.

At that moment he espied at a distance the lovely park, Asokavana, enclosed by high walls. He chanted Rama's name and felt he would find Sita in the garden. He reached the high walls of the garden quickly and began to survey it.

Hanuman decided to leave no spot in the Asokavana unexplored. As he jumped from tree to tree the flowers fell in a shower on him. The birds and other creatures there took him to be the god of spring himself. The Asokavana as a whole presented an enchanting appearance. When Maruthi reached a particularly beautiful spot there, he thought that Sita, wan and dispirited from her long separation from Rama, would be surely coming to this spot to seek respite.



Maruthi of matchless intellect, climbed upon a lofty simsupa tree that was nearby and hid behind its leaves. Expecting the appearance of Sita from any quarter he gazed intently all round.

And sure enough he saw her on a terrace beneath a tall simsupa tree. All around her, rakshasis were on guard with great watchfulness. Sita was lean and emaciated through long fast. A single garment worked in gold, but dirty and ragged was all that, she wore on her body which was covered with dust.

Hanuman felt proud of Sita's virtuous determination and unbounded patience. Her divine form inspired him.

From his lofty perch Hanuman watched Ravana approaching Sita, making unsuccessful advances to her and retreating in anger and disgrace.

Hanuman found Sita inconsolable with grief. Sita came to the tree on which Hanuman was hiding. He thought that this was the opportune moment to disclose his identity. He did so discreetly and tactfully and finally gave her the signet ring from Rama. This convinced Sita about the truth of Hanuman's mission.





Hanuman informed her how Lord Rama was grief stricken at her separation. He also assured her that now that he knew her whereabouts, the moment Lord Rama heard the news he would hasten to Lanka and kill Ravana.

Sita then made many enquiries about Rama's welfare and related two incidents known so far only to Rama and her.

One was about a crow, which caused injury to her as Rama lay asleep with his head on her lap. When a drop of blood fell on Rama's face, Rama woke up. On learning about the audacious behaviour of the crow, Rama, got enraged, invoked the Brahmastra mantra on a blade of grass and sent it whirling through the air. The blade chased the crow wherever it went.

The crow after approaching many and finding that none could help him, finally surrendered to Rama and he, in his infinite mercy, was pleased to forgive it, only taking its left eye as the target of the Brahmastra.

The other was when they were on the top of a hill. The tilaka on Sita's face got effaced and immediately Rama made a tilaka, with the red-coloured manassila.



Hanuman heard the two incidents narrated by Sita with rapt attention, so that he might repeat them verbatim to Rama and so that, on hearing them, Rama would not have any doubt about the identity of the person met by him (Hanuman) at the Asokavana in Lanka

Sita then handed to Hanuman her choodamani, the crest-jewel and asked Hanuman to inform Rama that she would remain alive for a month and if within that time he did not redeem her, She would give up her life.

Hanuman comforted her with encouraging words, took leave of her and repaired northward to plan what he should do next.



His mission fulfilled, Hanuman turned his attention to Lanka. Before returning home, he would find out more about the strength of the rakshasas and the secrets of Lanka's defences. After that there would be time too for some mischief.

But while wandering about Lanka Hanuman was caught by the rakshasas and taken to Ravana. Here was a chance for Hanuman to act as Rama's envoy to the court of Ravana.

Hanuman paid tribute to Rama's great valour and piety. Ravana would do well to return Sita to Rama with presents and an apology. Rama would surely forgive him. This good counsel fell on deaf ears. Ravana ordered that Hanuman's tail be set on fire.

When this was done, however, Hanuman escaped and spread the fire all over the city. Soon the whole of Lanka was ablaze.



Back among his own kind, Hanuman had a gripping story to tell. The *vanaras* were jubilant that the mission had succeeded.

Hanuman gave Rama an account of all that had happened in the island of Lanka. He gave Rama the crest-jewel and the message he had brought from Sita.

At the sight of the jewel, thoughts of Sita surged in Rama's mind and he was again overcome by grief.

Rama thanked Hanuman for his great service and said he was sorry that in his present condition he could not reward him well.





From Hanuman Rama learnt in detail about the defences of Lanka.

Then, at an auspicious moment, the vanaras under the command of Neela began to march towards the seashore opposite Lanka. Never before had such a vast army been on the move. The din and bustle of the march rent the air. As far as the eye could see there were only vanaras who had joined in the fight against the rakshasas.

Soon the army reached the seashore and was ordered to rest in a nearby forest.



Meanwhile many things were happening in Lanka. Ravana was disturbed by the havoc wrought by a single *vanara*. The *rakshasas* urged Ravana to raise a. huge army and rout Rama and his *vanara* hordes.

Vibhishana, who had only his brother's good at heart, advised Ravana to surrender and restore Sita to Rama. Ravana was angry when he heard this counsel and ordered Vibhishana to leave the kingdom immediately.

Renouncing his home, family and friends Vibhishana went over to Rama's camp and was given asylum by the Prince of Ayodhya.



Rama wanted a bridge to be built to link the mainland with Lanka. But for this the help of the sea-god, Varuna, was required.

When Varuna failed to answer his summons, Rama in great wrath swore he would scorch the seas and dry up the ocean. When he started doing so, the sea-god was humbled. He appeared on the crest of the waves and promised all his help for building the bridge.



Millions of *vanaras* were at work. They brought huge boulders from the hills and tall trees from the forests. Skilful workers laid them side-by-side and built a long powerful bridge across the sea, which would bear the weight of the army of *vanaras* and other creatures.

In great jubilation the *vanaras* crossed the bridge to Lanka. They camped within sight of the city in a region where there was plenty of fruits, wild roots and water.

The signs were auspicious for the *Vanara* army. There was great excitement everywhere at the approach of war with the *rakshasas*.

But the news that the *vanaras* had pitched camp in the shadow of the city worried Ravana.





Ravana called his ablest spies and ordered them to go into the *vanara* ranks and find out their strength. Three *rakshasa* spies, well disguised, went into the *vanara* camp but they were caught and brought before Rama. Rama, compassionate at heart, pardoned them. He would not punish even his enemies if they regretted their actions.

The spies returned to Lanka and advised Ravana to desist from the fight because the *vanaras* were so mighty that they could not be defeated.

There was much activity in both camps as the hour of war approached. The *vanaras* made careful plans to besiege Lanka and the army was divided into several groups.

One day, from his camp Sugriva saw Ravana seated in regal splendour on the topmost terrace of his palace. The sight of the proud *rakshasa* king provoked Sugriva. He leapt over the walls of Lanka and dropped in front of Ravana.

Sugriva challenged Ravana to a fight and the duel was long and fierce. At last, Ravana decided to use his powers of magic to kill Sugriva. The *vanara* guessed what Ravana had in mind and flew back to his camp.



The great war began badly for the *rakshasas*. Their chieftains met with many ill omens on the way to the battlefield and few returned.

Enraged at the course of the war, Ravana himself took the field. He struck down Lakshmana with a deadly weapon and went up to Rama. With powerful *astras* (weapons) Rama smashed Ravana's chariot, horses, weapons and crown.

As Ravana stood on the field alone, bereft of arms and mount, the noble Rama spoke to him thus: "Oh! Ravana of matchless valour! You are tired and you have had bad luck. It is not proper for me to continue the fight. Go to Lanka, take rest and come back tomorrow with chariot and weapons."



Ravana was depressed. Many of his brave and trusted warriors had fallen and the princes of Ayodhya were victorious. The time had come, he thought, for him to seek the help of his valiant brother, Kumbhakarna, who had just begun one of his long spells of sleep.

Waking up the giant of slumber was no easy task. A thousand *rakshasas* were engaged for the job. Simultaneously they sent up a thunderous roar. They beat on huge noisy drums and blew resounding conches. They smote him and rolled him over.

At last, with a monstrous yawn Kumbhakarna awoke. He took mountains of food and emptied barrels of drink. He was now ready for the fight. He hastened to Ravana to take his orders. .



Kumbhakarna sallied forth into the battlefield. The *vanaras* were terrified when they saw the huge monstrous form advancing towards them.

The mighty *rakshasa* killed hundreds of *vanaras* and spread panic in their ranks. Lakshmana tried to stop his progress but in vain.

Kumbhakarna tore a peak off a mountain and hurled it at Rama. But even while the huge boulder was in the air, Rama reduced it to rubble with a shower of arrows. Rama aimed a powerful *astra* and Kumbhakarna sank to the ground for the sleep of the dead.





The *vanaras* won many victories but the course of war was not even. There was havoc and destruction among the *vanaras* when Indrajit, the valiant son of Ravana, took the field.

Indrajit, who defeated the great god Indra in battle, had magical powers and deadly weapons in his armoury. He used them with terrible accuracy and effect.

Remaining invisible, he aimed the *Brahmastra* (the weapon got from Brahma) at Rama and Lakshmana and they fell in a swoon.

To revive the princes, the rare herbs of the Sanjeevi Mountain in the Himalayas were needed. Hanuman who was sent to fetch them could not locate them. So he uprooted the whole mountain and carried it aloft to Lanka.



Indrajit went to battle again. With his magic he became invisible and rained arrows on the *vanaras*. He tormented his opponents and tried to frighten Lakshmana.

In the middle of the fight he took time off to perform a fire sacrifice, which would make him unconquerable. Lakshmana, with the help of the *vanaras*, prevented Indrajit from finishing the sacrifice.

Lakshmana and Indrajit fought long and bitterly using the most potent weapons got from the gods. The end of Indrajit came when Lakshmana took out the *Indrastra* (the weapon of Indra) and aimed it at the enemy. The arrow cut off Indrajit's head and it tumbled down with crown, ornaments and all.

The climax of the war was the great battle between Rama and Ravana. Never did such powerful warriors face each other.

They fought bitterly for full seven days and nights. The deadliest weapons of earth and heaven were used. The creatures of heaven gathered in their hosts to watch the great combat.



On the side of Rama were not only strength and power but also truth and justice. On Ravana's side was the might of the *rakshasas* drunk with power, cruel at heart and out to do harm. Good was ranged against evil.

Rama took up the *Brahmastra* and invoking on it the appropriate *mantra* sent it against Ravana. The *astra* did its work unerringly and returned to Rama's hands. His heart blown by the shattering force of the *astra*, Ravana fell on the ground lifeless.

The fall of Ravana demoralised the *rakshasa* remnants and they dispersed in confusion. The war was at an end. The gods showered flowers on Rama.

The *vanara* leaders acclaimed Rama's superhuman deed of valour and fell to worshipping him.



At Rama's bidding Hanuman entered Lanka after getting Vibhishana's permission and reported Rama's success to Sita. Sita was stunned by the joyful news and remained silent. "Mother, why do you not speak to me? What worries you?" asked Hanuman reverently. Sita, said in sweet tones, "Child, the good news you brought robbed me of speech for a while. It has comforted my afflicted soul. I am unable to think of a suitable reply. Not all the riches of the world can recompense the joy and help I have received from you. Your wisdom, prowess, humility, patience and skill are all unique."

Hanuman was pleased beyond measure. He said, "Mother, please permit me to kill these heartless *rakshasis* who tormented you all these days." But Sita who was endowed with divine nature, dissuaded Hanuman from such an idea and convinced him that it would not be proper to kill the *rakshasis* who, after all, tormented her because they had to obey Ravana's orders and not out of their free will. Hanuman was deeply impressed by Sita's words of wisdom and compassion and exclaimed, " Mother, you are the true consort of Rama. Please tell me what reply I should take back."

"*Vanara* hero! I desire to behold my Lord." Assuring Sita that she would soon have that pleasure, Hanuman reverently took leave of her and reached Rama's presence.





Sita wanted to prove to the entire world her blameless virtue. Sita asked Lakshmana to kindle a fire for her. Reading Rama's tacit approval in His looks, Lakshmana kindled a fire. Videha's Daughter rejoiced at heart to perceive the blazing fire and prayed to Agni thus: "If in thought, word and deed I have never set my heart on anyone other than Sri Rama, may Agni, which knows the working of all minds, become cool like sandal-paste to me."

When Mithili (Sita) entered the flames, they were cool like sandal-paste. Then fire-god *Agni* appeared bearing the radiant form of Sita pure in body and soul and presented to Sri Rama. The devas in their delight rained down flowers and kettle-drums sounded in the air.



Sri Rama made Vibhishana the King of Lanka. Vibhishana wanted Sri Rama to take rest so that He could leave for Ayodhya, next day. But as Bharata is taking severe austerities and waiting for His arrival, Sri Rama could not take any pleasantries at that time. The fourteen-year exile period is over and Bharata had vowed to end his life if Sri Rama doesn't return before that. Sri Rama instructed Hanuman to immediately go to Bharata and tell all that has happened. Vibhishana then told that they could reach Ayodhya fast by the Pushpaka Vimana (aerial car) and Rama, Lakshmana, Sita, Vanaras and Vibhishana mounted Pushpaka vimana and started for Ayodhya.

Bharata, Shatrugna, ministers and all the people of Ayodhya were overjoyed by the news of Sri Rama's arrival. The sage Vasishta thereupon instructed Sumantra, who, as soon as he received the order, merrily proceeded and forthwith got ready a number of chariots and numerous horses and elephants and despatched messengers here and there. The city of Ayodhya was most tastefully decorated and the gods rained down a continuous shower of flowers.



Sri Rama, after finishing His ablutions, decked Himself with jewels; the beauty of His person put to shame hundreds of Cupids. The mothers-in-law immediately bathed Sita with tenderness and carefully attired her in heavenly robes with rich jewels. Thereafter Sri Rama and Janaki were seated in a heavenly throne, which was effulgent like the sun, and the Abhisheka (sacred crowning ceremony) was conducted while Brahmans recited Vedic hymns. The sages and devas in the heavens shouted "Victory! Victory!" and a large number of kettle-drums sounded and Gandharvas and Kinnaras sang and heavenly nymphs danced.

The Lord performed myriads of horse-sacrifices and bestowed innumerable gifts on the Brahmanas. The Defender of the Vedic usage and the champion of righteousness, He was another Indra. A mine of beauty, virtuous and meek, Sita was ever devoted to Her lord. She knew the greatness of the All-merciful Lord and adored His lotus-feet with a devoted heart. She did all household work with Her own hands and invariably did what would afford delight to Sri Ramacandra. Devoid of pride and conceit, She waited upon Kauslya and all the other mothers-in-law in the palace.